

BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

Minutes of the meeting held at 35 Great Smith Street, London on Thursday 10 December 2015 at 14:30.

Present:-

The Hon. Mrs Justice Patterson	Deputy Chair
Mr D Elvin QC	Commissioner
Mr N Pringle	“
Mr S Hartley	Secretary
Mr A Bellringer	Deputy Secretary
Mr G Reed	Secretariat
Miss C Bransgrove	Cabinet Office Communications

The presence of the Assessors from Ordnance Survey and the Statistics Authority was not required at the meeting.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1.1 The Commission formally welcomed Mr Hartley to his new role as statutory Secretary to the Commission.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 SEPTEMBER 2015

2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved by the Commission and signed by the Deputy Chair.

3. COMMUNICATIONS PLAN OUTLINE FOR THE 2018 REVIEW (BCE/2015/Paper 7)

3.1 The Commission took this paper first, as Miss Bransgrove had a later commitment elsewhere.

3.2 The Commission generally endorsed the outline plan, noting the planning and logistical support that would be provided to the Review by the Cabinet Office Communications, but were clear that the Commission must retain ultimate ownership of its own communications: in particular that final sign-off of more detailed plans should lie with the Commissioners, and that external-facing communications should come from staff working within the BCE Secretariat itself, not an individual within the Cabinet Office Communications team, to make clear that these were the views of the Commission, rather than the Government.

3.3 The Commission agreed that in the context of increasing technological expectations, and increasing pressure to achieve savings in public finance, it was important to limit hard copy publication of materials, focusing instead on maximising engagement of the public digitally. Accordingly, it would be important for the development of the online consultation portal and the wider communications activities to work together and complement each other.

3.4 The Commission agreed that production of hard copy materials for consultation should more closely adhere to the basic statutory requirement, which was for a single place of deposit in

each constituency, although a small number of extra places of deposit might be considered in the geographically largest constituencies.

3.5 Constituencies would still receive deposited papers, even if no change was proposed in that constituency. The pack for hard copy deposit should consist of the textual report for that region, plus an A3 map of that proposed constituency, plus one A0 map of all the proposed constituencies in that region. MPs should similarly be issued individually a copy of the textual report for their region, together with an A3 map for each proposed constituency that contained part of their existing constituency, with a covering letter setting out how to access online maps for other constituencies in their region and beyond.

3.6 The Commission felt that it was important to make clearer the messaging around the initial proposals, that those were only the initial ideas of the Commission, based primarily on the mathematical factors: importantly they were not presumed to be 'perfect' and the Commission actively sought evidence from the public that might support revisions, particularly those grounded in local and community factors of which the Commission would probably be unaware at the outset.

4. UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2018 REVIEW (BCE/2015/Paper 5)

4.1 The Commission noted the progress that had been made in preparing for the Review since the last meeting, and were content with the progress that was being made.

5. POLICIES FOR THE 2018 REVIEW (BCE/2015/Paper 6)

5.1 Sub-division of England into European Parliamentary elections regions: Agreed that this should be the administrative basis of working in the 2018 Review. Although there would not be an absolute bar on a constituency that crossed a region border, there would need to be an exceptional and compelling reason for doing so. In light of the overwhelming support for that approach in the 2013 Review, and as there was no evidence that views had changed in relation to this, it was further agreed that it would not be necessary to consult on this approach, as the Commission had done for the 2013 Review.

5.2 Splitting of wards: The Commission re-affirmed its previous decision that it would take a slightly more relaxed approach to circumstances in which it would be prepared to split a ward. However, whilst internal guidance for staff might be developed to clarify broad circumstances in which the Commission might (or would not) consider splitting a ward, the Commission wished to take a very basic line for external communications, such as "The Commission retains a presumption in favour of keeping wards whole, though it may be prepared to split a ward where there are strong reasons to do so, having regard to the statutory factors."

5.3 The permitted electorate range: The Commission confirmed that its approach was simply to achieve constituencies where the electorate was within the permitted range, not to attempt to get constituencies as close as possible to the electoral quota figure itself.

5.4 Adjacent and detached parts: The Commission agreed to create, as far as possible, constituencies from wards that are adjacent to each other, and that do not contain 'detached parts' (where the only physical connection between two parts of the constituency requires travel through another constituency).

- 5.5 Naming and designation: The Commission endorsed its previous policy, including aiming to have a maximum three place names in any one constituency name, and avoiding the use of commas. In relation to designation, it agreed to continue its policy that a constituency that has anything more than a small rural element should be designated a county constituency, with all others designated as a borough constituency.
- 5.6 Public hearings: The Commission agreed that booking of venues should be done on an assumption that each hearing would last the statutory maximum of two days. However, given the Commission's experience at the last review, the publicity for hearings should make clearer the circumstances and arrangements whereby a second day of a hearing may be cancelled if first day attendance was very low. The Commission's initial view on a party being offered a special long session at the 'lead' hearing in each region was that a party would only qualify for that if they held at the time at least one UK Parliament seat in that region, though they were open to discussion on this. The Commission agreed to discuss this with the political parties at the initial meeting with them in the New Year.
- 5.7 Late representations: The Commission agreed to endorse its previous policy not to consider late representations – regardless of the sender – unless the delay could be proven to be the fault of the delivery agent.
- 5.8 Assistant Commissioners: The Commission reaffirmed its intention to secure an average of two ACs per region. The Commission was keen for information to be provided very clearly in advance to potential applicants about the particular roles and responsibilities, the importance of team-working, and particularly the adjusted approach for the 2018 Review of having the ACs work more as part of the Secretariat team for the region, rather than separate from it, i.e. ACs needed to appreciate they were assisting the Commission, not being a separate scrutineer. The Commission's general approach was that the ACs would be tasked with being 'expert advisers' to the Commission, rather than independent approvers of the revised proposals.
- 5.9 2018 Review timetable: The Commissioners noted and agreed the outline project timetable for the 2018 Review.
- 5.10 Meeting with the political party representatives: The Commission agreed that all Commissioners should attend; due to various commitments, the meeting would need to take place in the latter part of February 2016. All political parties holding at least one English seat in the House of Commons should be invited to send a representative, once a date had been fixed. It was felt that a second subsequent meeting with the party representatives was unlikely to be necessary.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 6.1 The Commission discussed a broad proposal from BBC Radio to do documentary-style work with the Commission and Secretariat during the 2018 Review. The Commissioners were supportive in principle, subject to ensuring the security of the substantive proposals development content before publication of actual proposals. They requested further details before giving their final approval.